

S.H. Gapp

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Some Ideals of the  
Moravian Church

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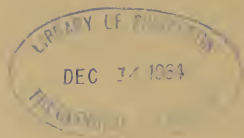
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# Some Ideals of the Moravian Church.

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A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REV.  
S. H. GAPP, AT PROVINCIAL SYNOD  
OF 1908, ON SEPTEMBER 2, 1908, AT  
LITITZ, PENNSYLVANIA. . . . .

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# Some Ideals of the Moravian Church.

BY THE REV. S. H. GAPP.

Conscious of the great responsibility resting upon me, as well as of the privilege accorded, I crave the Holy Spirit's endowment and the faithful intercession of all my brethren, as in the Saviour's name, I bring to the members of the Synod of 1908 and to the kind friends of the Lititz congregation, this message in the form of the English Synodal sermon. The law of the Church limits the speaker to "a sermon or address on any subject connected with the history, principles, ritual or polity of the Moravian Church." I have chosen for my theme:

## SOME DETERMINATIVE IDEALS OF THE MORAVIAN CHURCH.

The text is found in Eph. 5:27 and reads: "*A glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.*"

That is Christ's ideal of the Church. He alone can make His congregation ideal. He gave Himself up for it in order to make it perfect. Nowhere in Scripture do we find a composite and complete picture of the Church's perfection. Nor has it ever been realized in history. It is to be found in the spiritual Church Universal, rather than in any historic part of the same. Each denomination has given preference to certain elements in the sum total of attributes that constitute the perfection of the Church. Of those which characterize our own beloved Zion, I wish to present three, namely:

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE NORM OF FAITH.
- II. TRUE SPIRITUALITY.
- III. EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM.

I. *The Bible as the Norm of Faith.*—As in certain former periods of history, there seems to be considerable uncertainty in our day as to the source of faith and the authority of Christian doctrine. Our position has always been this: The Bible is our real and only *Regula Fidei*. The Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible ever

has been and still is our battle-cry. The entire reformatory work of the illustrious Hus was based upon his simple faithfulness to the Bible. The men who founded the ancient *Unitas Fratrum* at Lititz in Bohemia placed as the first of the four basic principles of their union, this: "The Bible is the only source of Christian doctrine." In the earliest days of the Resuscitated Unity, the chief stress was laid upon loving faith in the meritorious work of our Saviour, but the old position as to the Bible remained unchanged. The last General Synod reaffirmed that position in these words: "The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are and shall remain the supreme rule of our faith and practice." This has been the war-cry of Protestantism, to be sure. But it is ours since before the Reformation and it is today. Our ideal is this: *every member standing fairly and squarely on a Bible faith.*

But there is no narrowness or bigotry in our view of the sacred Scriptures. Our leaders of ancient and modern times were men of broad culture and wide sympathies. Hus, our founder, was a University rector. Some of the resuscitators of our Church were University graduates and professors. Our educational activity and reputation stand on a sure foundation. We are not afraid of intellect. We court the fullest investigation of religious truth. Our eyes are always open to the light, from whatever source it may come.

We assert the *authority* of the Bible as opposed to *Church authority, creeds and tradition* on the one hand, and the *consensus of modern opinion* on the other. But we do not despise Church authority and tradition. We do not with Creeds as birds with their nests—build new ones each year. We honor these shibboleths of Christian progress, even though we refuse to bind our consciences by any of them.

We assert the *sufficiency* of the Scriptures as a revelation of divine truth, as opposed to the need of further revelation as coming from the inner light of human consciousness, or from the inner light of the indwelling of

the Spirit in the heart. But we do not despise human reason, one of the best of God's good gifts. Still less do we make light of the Spirit in making Biblical truth plain. We accept all of them as of ancillary value; we reject all of them as sources, standards or tests of Christian doctrine.

The ground of our simple faith in Scripture must not be sought for in bigotry, but in our strong conviction of the insufficiency of reason to grasp the fulness of our holy faith. Nothing is more plain to us than that. The finite can not grasp the infinite; the human can not master the divine; time can not comprehend eternity. Religion is not the highest development of man's longing search after God; it is God's profoundest revelation from above. Therefore it transcends man's mental powers. Man-made and mind-made tenets are shields of brass, not of gold, empty cisterns that hold no water.

In one respect, our Biblical position—the common possession of Protestantism—is quite unique. We define our religious tenets in the words of Scripture, not in terms of man's logic. And when we come upon doctrines which exceed our power of comprehension, we receive them as mysteries which God has willed to withhold from us. This seemed childish to one old Reformer and seems unmanly to many modern critics, but it is the child-like faith which is most pleasing to God. Our General Synod has given this rule: "That it is not our business to determine what Holy Scripture has left undetermined." Says the tract, "Moravians and their Faith:" "Concerning certain 'mysteries' of Scripture, such as the Trinity, Predestination, the Sacraments, and the method of Regeneration, the Moravians never thought it right to set up definitions which should bind the conscience."

Two *happy consequences* have resulted from our faithfulness to the Bible. First, a most remarkable freedom from doctrinal dissension, heresy-hunting, heart-burnings and personal bitterness. We are so thoroughly agreed as to our basis, that the minor differences of view

and conviction can in no wise disturb the peace of our Zion.

But better yet, that stand gives to our Church to-day a firm hold on all the great doctrines of Scripture. Wave upon wave of materialistic attack, of critical and hypercritical fault-finding, of pseudo-philosophical and quasi-scientific objections and of agnostic sneers have failed to land us in the quagmire of doubt. We still have a *personal God*, who is our loving Father. We do not spell our God with two o's and our devil without a d. Good and evil are not the same as God and devil. We are not satisfied with the "unimaginable attenuation of philosophic speculation about the Deity." The heat of our mental activity has not sublimated God into the vapor of a phenomenon. God is our loving Father.

We still have a *divine Christ*. We have not been led astray by the noble sentiment of the goodness of the man Jesus and His ideal nature in life and character. "Thou art the Son of the living God" remains our confession of faith.

Best of all, we still have the *precious blood of Jesus* for our redemption. There was a time when the question was discussed whether Christ died for all, or only for some. To-day, the world seriously debates the question, whether He died for *any*. But we do not doubt it. The specious and dangerous cry of salvation by character has not blinded us. We believe that His blood washes away all guilt and we find peace in that belief.

And so with all the great doctrines. They are real and true. They mean much to us. Thank God that our Church stands solidly upon this basis and that there is no suspicion of unfaithfulness to the Word of God!

II. *True Spirituality*.—By that we mean not only that our members must be characterized by the absence of a feverish and consuming attachment to the material things of this world and by a real interest in the invisible things of religion and of God, but that each heart must have made a positive experience of regeneration. General Synod has said: "It has from the beginning



and must ever remain the aim of the Moravian Church to be a living Church, *in which every individual member is a true Christian.*” Without spirituality, no man can be a true Christian. “God is a Spirit and they that worship Him, must worship Him in Spirit.” Our religion is a spiritual religion and therefore individual spirituality is an absolute essential in a Christian. We can not guard this ideal too jealously.

True spirituality is produced in only one way—*by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart.* “The mark of all true children of God is that they have received the Spirit of Christ.” (General Synod.) “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” (Rom. 8:9.) Mysterious as that indwelling may be, it is a real experience in the heart of the believer. It practically manifests itself in “walking after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4), i.e., in a manner of life in harmony with the Spirit of God.

Hence true spirituality is manifested in a two-fold manner. First of all, *in deep, inner devotion.* Our religion must touch the heart. There is emotion, warmth in it. It is not cold, hard, lifeless. Our hearts throb with feeling in God’s holy presence. Wild excitement has no place in our worship, neither have the coldness and rigor of death. Even the seraphim who stand before God, use two of three pairs of wings modestly to hide themselves, thus expressing their holy awe (Isa. 6:2). Surely we sinful mortals must come into His presence with equal awe.

And our warm love finds its culmination in *devotion to Jesus personally.* His precious Name is as ointment poured forth. The thought of Him fills our hearts with rapture. Zinzendorf in his poetic fervor once declared that if he should ever swoon, the mere mention of Jesus’ sacred Name would forthwith restore him to consciousness. Jesus’ every action, His every word, delights us. We like to meditate about Him, His word, His work. Mary sitting at His feet—that is our model. We also choose that good part, that one thing needful. We envy

Mary the privilege of demonstrating to Jesus and all the world her intense love by pouring the ointment of spike-nard over His head and feet. It was the noble extravagance of love. Oh, could we but love that Saviour thus!

His suffering and death call forth our deepest devotion. Gethsemane, where He passed through the rigors of spiritual anguish; Pilate's Hall, where rude hands abused Him so awfully; and Golgotha, where He poured out His life-blood for our salvation; oh, how they thrill our souls and bind us fast to Him!

True spirituality also manifests itself in *a life of practical righteousness*. With us, devotion must not fritter away in feeling. It is impossible to separate true devotion from its practical result in life. A holy life is the external proof of inner spirituality. "Godly, Christian life is essential as an evidence of saving faith" was the fourth basic principle on which the ancient Unity was founded. A true Christian must show "the fruits of the Spirit" or graces of character. Sanctification, holiness of life, is a primary demand of God. This is a noble ideal.

But do we not emphasize the total depravity of man—*die arme Suenderschaft*—more strongly than perhaps any other church? Yes. But by total depravity we mean only that our graces of character give us no claim on God's salvation. By nature we are evil and unfit for heaven. Whatever virtues we have are God's handiwork. They are necessary as fruits of conversion, but count for nothing in our salvation, which is by grace on God's part and by faith on man's.

We consider it fraught with danger to magnify our sanctification in God's presence though we assert it over against the world. It so easily leads to spiritual pride and pride goeth before a fall. We strictly demand righteousness as a proof of devotion, but do not pride ourselves on its possession.

True spirituality is *fostered in a two-fold manner*.—On its devotional side, spirituality is fostered by our *splendid ritual*. This is indeed a precious inheritance

from the fathers. We do not fear beautiful, dignified, even ornate forms of worship; at the same time we do not make them essentials or ends in themselves. They are but means to an end. That end is the spiritual uplift of the worshipper. Everything in the conduct of our services must make for edification. Our liturgical forms are marked by simplicity, dignity, spiritual meaning, variety and provision for all kinds of services, ordinary, sacramental and special. The participation of the congregation is amply provided for. Only the most suitable instrumental music is permitted and our congregational singing is hearty. Our methods of preaching greatly heighten the value of our services. Not intellectual brilliance and coldness, but spiritual warmth in the simple preaching of the Gospel—that is our ideal. All these taken together make our public services of inestimable value to the spiritual needs of spiritually-minded people.

In the great revival of 1727, there is one point easily overlooked. Whatever special efforts led up to that event, we must never forget that the gracious outpouring of the Spirit came at a confirmation and communion service—one of the regular services of the Church.

On its practical side, spirituality is fostered by our *excellent discipline*. The discipline of our ancient Unity called forth the admiration of the leaders of the Reformation. The organization of congregations in the Renewed Church was admirably fitted for enforcing discipline in its wider sense of Christian nurture. Nor were they afraid to administer discipline in its narrower sense of reproof for false doctrine or evil behavior. They exercised it lovingly as is right, but strictly as is meet.

We are in danger of neglecting discipline, if we have not already fallen far below our Church's standard. Modern conditions of church life make its enforcement very difficult. Our members are perhaps not sufficiently acquainted with the aims and methods of discipline. Pastors and Boards of Elders are lax in administering

it. People do not seem to fear it and treat even its extreme form of exclusion very lightly.

But the "power of keys" has not been given in vain. It is not a sacerdotal power. With us it rests with the Elders, laymen, under the leadership of the pastor. Let no man underestimate the seriousness of the act, when a Board of honest, Spirit-filled believers decides that a certain man is not worthy of the fellowship of the Church! No Church can exclude from heaven, but it can judge with some degree of accuracy whether or not a man is faithful to those doctrines and duties which are given as conditions of salvation. A strict enforcement of our discipline would greatly favor the growth of practical righteousness.

III. *Effective Evangelism.*—The Master said: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." *A working church*—that is our ideal. Every member must be a laborer in the Lord's vineyard, besides being a true Christian. But what is the work of the Church? *Christ in His ministry is our ideal of the Church at work.* "He went about doing good" is a striking epitome of His ministry. He never missed an opportunity. He neglected not any kind of good work. He blessed the little children, fed the hungry, instructed the ignorant, reproved the haughty, corrected the sinner, healed the sick, raised the dead. But the spiritual interests of man were ever uppermost in His mind. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," was the theme of His first sermon as reported by Matthew. He asserted that it was His mission "to seek and to save the lost." "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, . . . to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Jesus, above everything else, wanted to save the souls of men for heaven, and every other good work was made ancillary to this.

And Christ *gave this same ideal* to His Church. "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world." Christ did not finish His work on

earth in one sense—that of applying His salvation to all mankind. He started that glorious work and then honored the Church and man by entrusting to them the completion of that noble work. Christ's work is our work.

In the Great Commission, Jesus plainly announces the means by which the Church is to accomplish this great aim. By preaching the Gospel everywhere, by making disciples of all nations, by teaching them obedience to Jesus. *Evangelism, with a view to winning all the world for Him, is Christ's own ideal of the working Church.* Renewed Moravianism has always felt and recognized the force of that statement. All arguing that ours is a truly evangelical Church in its methods of work as well as in its teaching is wasted breath. No one can deny that such has been our position from the very beginning. We are still prominently evangelistic in our foreign mission work. In our home work, however, we do not seem to be so clear as to the meaning and method of evangelism as the real work of the Church. It is so easy to fasten upon one method of work and to exalt that at the expense of others. Social activity within the Church, sociological work outside of the pale of the Church, general charity, financial schemes in aid of the Church—all these have their defenders. Has there not been for a long time, and is there not now, a dispute in progress between the adherents of the Christian instruction method and the revivalistic method of carrying forward the work of the Church? The truth of the matter is, that neither has a preponderant claim over the other; neither is the exclusive way of saving souls, and we need infinitely more of both. Jesus never conducted revival meetings; He never taught a catechetical class in preparation for Confirmation. But by all possible means He did strive to save souls from sin.

In our own history we have a splendid example of true evangelism in the work of the "League of the Four Brethren." They established schools for poor children and for the children of the nobility, they conducted an

apothecary for the sick, they issued Christian literature for the poor, they conducted a wide-spread correspondence, they visited wherever possible, they determined to support missions among the most degraded heathen, they conducted prayer-meetings, and the two clergymen of the League preached powerful Gospel sermons—and all this with only one aim in view. They desired to save souls for the dear Lord. It was evangelism from beginning to end—the schools, the drug store, the literature, as well as the prayer-meetings and the Gospel sermons. What is true evangelism? Not charity, not education, not religious instruction, not inner mission, not foreign missions, not revivalism, not any one of them, but all of them together, in which the entire Church without distinction as to clergy or laity is engaged for the saving of souls.

That this is a proper ideal for the clergy will probably be taken as a matter of course. It applies with equal force to the laity. The position, dignity and responsibility of the laity are as high with us as anywhere in the world. Lay activity has been a specialty in our Church for a long time—even in days when it was laughed at by others. And we expect our laity to engage in *spiritual* activity. The "Busch-Prediger" Christian David, Melchior and David Nitschmann, Martin-Schneider, together with the Kunewalde and Zauchten-thal revivals should ever remain a great inspiration to the lay workers of our Church. Our General Synod says this to the laity: "It shall be the duty not only of the executive boards, but of every member, to assist the pastor in the congregation, both in public and in private, . . . by visitation, exhorting the sinner, comforting the sick, bringing relief to the needy and, *after apostolic example, preaching the Gospel from house to house.*"

The result of living up to such an ideal would surely be remarkable growth and extension in every direction. But does this not fly in the face of all our inherited traditions? Our forefathers deliberately chose to be a small Church. They worked solely for the kingdom of

the Lord, even at the expense of denominational prospects. They wanted to be a "remnant." They retired to small, closed communities. Goethe called the Moravians "*die abgesonderten Heiligen.*" Zinzendorf before his death lamented the rapid home development of the Church he had fostered.

And Zinzendorf had a good and sufficient reason for his desire for a small Church. He was not moved by the fear of being great that has afflicted some Moravians since his time. For at the same time that the Moravians lived in their exclusive settlements, they started their wonderful missions to the heathen in every part of the world. His idea was rather this: that within the larger body of the State Church, there should be gathered a smaller body of men and women, who might attain unto the perfect internal development of the body of Christ and become trained and fully equipped specialists in all manner of soul-saving work. The "little church within the Church" idea we American Moravians have long ago definitely and decidedly given up. Many of us are ready to join in the words of the poet:

"Pray heaven our greatness may not fail  
Through craven fear of being great."

But God grant that the day may never come when we forget this ideal: *every member a perfect Christian and a trained worker for Jesus* at home or abroad, without distinction as to age, sex, station or ordination!

With these and other ideals of our Church in mind, let us begin in faith and carry to successful conclusion, the work of our Synod—moved by intense faithfulness to the revealed Word, by a personal love for Jesus, the precious Saviour, and by a loyalty to the Church of our choice that will enthuse us to the hardest work in her interests.

And may God's richest blessing rest on us all. Amen!









*Gaylord*

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